

March of

KW Motorsport's March 09 Recreation may have classic looks, but its mechanicals and dynamics belong very much to this decade, as John Hayman reports

The term 'recreation' tends to conjure up images of Cobras, GT40s and Jaguars of various descriptions, yet in this instance the M09R (March 09 Recreation, to give it its full title) is a recreation in backward engineering terms only.

KW Motorsport (KWM) has used the March 75S's iconic design and built upon it, rather than just replicate something from 36 years ago. Therefore it's as modern and cutting edge as it can be for the championship and price point that the M09R has been designed to serve.

The SRCC Sports 2000 club regs place a price ceiling of £42,000+VAT on turnkey new-build Duratec-class Sports 2000 cars like the one we're testing today. The regs also govern materials choice, which means that the

M09R runs with an aluminium monocoque chassis and gelcoat glass-reinforced composite body panels; carbonfibre isn't eligible. There's no compromise on safety, though; the very latest Finite Element Analysis (FEA) was used in the design of the car's steel structures.

However, KWM has chosen a modular design process for the M09R which allows for greater flexibility in these troubled times, so expect a carbonfibre tub as an option in the near future for use outside S2000, a focused trackday version, as well as a range of race applications such as CN sports prototypes with Honda K20 powerplants eligible for the V de V and Speed race series.

As tested in S2000 spec, however, it's powered by the very popular 2.0-

litre Ford Duratec DHE 420 (143bhp version). The all-aluminium, fuel injected, twin cam 16-valve unit is compact, light, and produces strong torque and power – aided considerably by the S2000 controlled upgrades. These comprise a bolt-on kit of individual throttle bodies mounted on a bespoke inlet manifold, dry sump oil system, lightweight flywheel with uprated clutch and a dedicated motorsport engine management ECU – combined they produce more than 200bhp at 7000rpm.

The drivetrain is likewise strictly controlled. A five-speed sequential gearbox, in this instance a Hewland FTR, drives the 13in three-piece rear wheels shod with Yokohama control slick crossply tyres – S2000 has recently announced Yokohama Radial



Time...

tyres will be used this season. That should improve upon the already impressive lap times of these S2000 Duratec cars – there's certainly no concern that the other components are up to the job of dealing with the additional grip they produce.

Suspension is courtesy of adjustable wishbones and pushrod and rockers operated Nitron NTF two-way adjustable dampers. Stopping duties are performed by Alcon 280mm steel discs clamped by Alcon Advantage four-pot callipers.

That's an impressive list of components, but the question is, do they come together to create an impressive race car? To answer that I'm double testing the M09R, initially in the dry in Kent, and then on a wet 'n' slimy surface in Buckinghamshire.

What a rare treat it is to have access to the GP circuit at Brands Hatch, especially as we're blessed with mighty fine weather. The secondary joy is that we're here on an RMA open pitlane trackday where the overtaking rules are of a relaxed nature (overtake on either side for example) – all in all, a perfect setting for a track test of such a car.

The cockpit initially feels a tad snug, but that's due to the bespoke moulded seat belonging to somebody shorter than me. Yet even in a less than perfect driving position, the wheel, pedals and gearlever (mounted on the right-hand sill) are all easily located. As are the dash controls – a push of the starter fires the Duratec instantly and it soon settles into a smooth idle. Clearly no angry cam installed here, a fact soon also to be evidenced out on the track.

Too often Duratec engines are tuned purely for high power outputs rather than for balanced bhp and torque, but with the M09R's S2000-spec unit there's a really useable spread of low down grunt in tune with the five-speed gearbox's ratios. It's something Caterham also got spot-on when it replaced the Rover K-series with tuned Duratec power in 2008.

The Duratec propels 515kg plus me with considerable vigour. Similarly, it's grunty enough to not require more than the five forward ratios. In fact, the M09R is producing some very impressive times – our race contributor, Nigel Greensall, joined me at Brands Hatch and set about chasing lap times after I vacated the seat. A 1.30.7 lap was his best on what can only be described as *well* used tyres.





The brakes are as I'd expect (and hope) in car like this – mighty. As well as impressive powers of retardation, they have sufficient pedal travel to modulate pressure, along with nicely progressive callipers. In a car that weighs as little as the M09R, you really don't want on/off brakes... The steering is impressive, too; quick and

informative, albeit a tad heavy compared with something like a Radical SR3, say.

Having driven a handful of S2000 Duratecs from several manufacturers over the last couple of years, the one thing that really sets apart one from another is the quality of the gearchange: the Hewland unit that

KWM fits as standard in the M09R has the sweetest shift. A mere partial lift of the throttle is all that's needed during upshifts (enough to slacken the load on the cogs) to ensure precise, hesitation-free gearchanges. Others I've tried are more reluctant and don't pass back such a clear message that the desired cog has actually connected. All,



SPECIFICATION

MAKE

March

MODEL

M09R

YEAR

2010

ENGINE

Duratec DHE, 2000cc, in-line 4cyl, 16v

MAXIMUM POWER

200bhp @ 7000rpm

FUELLING

Multipoint fuel injection, throttle bodies

GEARBOX

Manual five-speed sequential, transaxle

BRAKES

Alcon 280mm ventilated discs all-round, Alcon Advantage four-pot callipers

TYRES

Yokohama Advan – F: 160/515 R13
R: 200/550 R13

WHEELS

March three-piece alloy – F: 6J x 13"
R: 8J x 13"

WEIGHT

515kg

VALUE

£42,000 + VAT



however, demand the use of the clutch on downshifts.

The Nitron dampers take pretty much everything in their stride – aggressively running the kerb at Stirling, say, doesn't faze them. Truth is, the only limiting factor to the M09R's entire driving experience is attributable to the old school crossply racing slicks. That's not to damn the tyres too much, simply to say that the level of development in the Duratec class has now moved on so far that crossply rubber is no longer suitable – hence the switch to Yokohama radial slicks in 2011.

Yet even on the outgoing crossplies fitted for today's session, the friendly nature of the M09R chassis and setup means the lack of ultimate grip is fun rather than a concern – sideways action, at speed, is a mere exuberant prod of throttle away... And that's why when KWM's managing director, Kieron Salter, suggests that the M09R would make a might fine trackday car, he would seem to have a valid point. The car is fun, fast and unstressed, stacking up as a very credible option should a downforce trackday special be your desire. (If something like this does attract you, then in our next issue you should read Anthony Dunn's feature on driving a downforce car – he dispels the myths, explains they aren't on rails and that driving one isn't a black art.)

A few days later and I'm at a wet and slippery Silverstone Stowe circuit. An M09R might not be everyone's first choice in which to learn a new circuit in the tipping rain, and yet the friendly and communicative nature of both its engine and chassis make it surprisingly appropriate for the task. Chassis feedback with the S2000 Yokohama racing wets fitted is as detailed as it is on slicks, and even with slightly softer damper and anti-roll bar settings for the grim conditions you can sense its inherent handling finesse. Just as I experienced earlier at Brands, initial turn-in generates a smidgen of understeer that a tweak of the throttle then eliminates. Thereafter it tracks superbly – and when it does let go it does so equally front and rear, resulting in a controlled drift. That's not to say rear traction can't be overcome by throttle inputs; it most certainly can!

Here at Silverstone we're lucky enough to have along Alan Hudd's superb classic S2000 Pinto-class March 85S, to help put the advances of the M09R into context. Like its modern forebear, the 85S is superbly



constructed and the numerous rows of rivets that join the plate aluminium sections of its monocoque chassis are things of beauty.

But once behind the wheel the differences are glaring – a Hewland four-speed H-pattern 'dog box instead of a five-speed sequential, for starters, and a 2.0-litre eight-valve all-iron Ford Pinto engine from the era when 12in flairs were normal attire, and fed by a

Weber carburettor rather than injection. It's sans wings, too – just an aero-shaped body with a splitter up front, along with a moulded rear deck and a dinky gurney flap.

The older March drives very differently, too. Clearly it's lacking the downforce generated by the M09R's wings, together with the power generated by the Duratec, but it's more than that – it somehow feels of another

era, which is no bad thing. The steering is superb, light and communicative, the gearshift a bit old school crash and bang compared with the slick-shifting sequential set-up. The suspension, however, is much softer allowing a tad of fore and aft pitch: the M09R doesn't move noticeably even on rain settings. And the engine's throttle response is slower, as you'd expect when comparing carbs with injection.



SPECIFICATION

MAKE

March

MODEL

85S

YEAR

1985

ENGINE

Ford Pinto 2000cc in-line 4cyl, 8v

MAXIMUM POWER

136bhp @ 6000rpm

FUELLING

Weber twin-downdraught carburettors

GEARBOX

Hewland four-speed 'dog box

BRAKES

245mm discs front and rear
2 piston calipers

TYRES

Yokohama Advan – F: 160/515 R13
R: 200/550 R13

WHEELS

March three-piece alloy – F: 6J x 13"
R: 8J x 13"

WEIGHT

500kg

VALUE

£26,000. (Currently for sale – for details contact john@trackdriver.com.)



In isolation, however, the 85S is a lovely thing, which is why I guess Pinto class grids are very well attended at most S2000 meetings. But it isn't a great idea to be familiar with Duratec power before hopping behind the wheel of one – the Pinto needs working hard to keep it on the boil and, as I soon discover, driving it like a Duratec isn't the way to go. The chassis' nature is very similar, though – a smidge of understeer on initial turn-in, again easily eliminated with a stroke of throttle, and again it tracks superbly once committed. It's very entertaining. The major difference, though, is that the 85S relies more on mechanical grip

than the aero variety, making it easier to relate to for folk who've never driven a downforce machine before.

I can't deny that cars of this type really are my thing. I'm not particularly keen on a roof over my head, love to hear an engine digesting air and fuel, and relish their lightweight nature. But that's usually from a racing perspective; I didn't expect to feel the same when considering something like the March as a trackday proposition. Yet on the right circuit, and in all conditions, it is. And as for the March 09 Recreation simply replicating the 75S? *Nah...* It might look alike, but the driving experience is bang up to date ■

Thanks to:

Alan Hudd
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